

CLAIMS

I claim:

- 5 1. A method of paperless product distribution comprising:
- supporting an interactive computer network purchase session in which a remote customer places a product order with a retailer for purchase of one or more products and for delivery to the customer;
- providing details of the product order to an independent local distributor, who is
- 10 geographically local to the customer, and providing a receipt code from the retailer in a return computer network message to the customer;
- initiating delivery of at least one of the ordered products from the independent local distributor to the customer; and
- receiving delivery confirmation, comprising return of the receipt code at the retailer
- 15 from the independent local distributor, and making payment from the retailer to the independent local distributor.
- 20 2. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein supporting an interactive computer network purchase session comprises maintaining an Internet web site through which the customer can place orders and make payment to the retailer.

3. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein providing details of the product order comprises sending a computer network message from the retailer to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and the customer who ordered them.

5 4. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein initiating delivery comprises a request from the retailer to the independent local distributor for delivery of at least one of the ordered products to the customer.

10 5. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein receiving delivery confirmation comprises receipt by the retailer of a computer network message containing the receipt code provided by the retailer to the customer.

15 6. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein initiating delivery comprises communicating a bid for contracting delivery from one of a plurality of local distributors to the retailer.

7. A method as defined in claim 6, wherein the local distributor's delivery bid includes an election of delivery level of service.

20 8. A method as defined in claim 6, wherein the retailer requests only one local distributor to deliver the ordered product.

9. A method of paperless product distribution comprising:

receiving a product order at a retailer computer site from a remote customer, the product order comprising a communication message sent over an interactive computer network system from the customer to the retailer, in which the customer specifies one or more retailer products for purchase and delivery;

sending details of the product order from the retailer computer site to an independent local distributor, who is local to the customer, and sending a receipt code in a communication message over the computer network system from the retailer computer site to the customer; and

receiving delivery confirmation at the retailer computer site, wherein the delivery confirmation comprises return of the receipt code sent to the customer in a communication message that is received from the independent local distributor and, in response, making payment from the retailer to the independent local distributor.

10. A method as defined in claim 9, wherein the interactive computer network system over which the communication message is sent comprises the Internet.

11. A method as defined in claim 9, wherein sending details of the product order comprises sending a computer network message to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and identifying the customer who ordered them, and requesting a bid from one or more local distributors for contracting delivery of the product order.

12. A method as defined in claim 9, wherein initiating delivery comprises communicating a bid for contracting delivery from one of a plurality of local distributors to the retailer.

5 13. A method as defined in claim 12, wherein the local distributor's delivery bid includes an election of delivery level of service.

14. A method as defined in claim 12, wherein the retailer requests only one local distributor to deliver the ordered product.

10 15. A computer system for a paperless product delivery system, the computer system comprising:

a retailer computer at a retailer business site; and

15 a network communications interface between an interactive computer network system and the retailer computer;

20 wherein the retailer computer (1) receives a product order from a remote customer, the product order comprising a communication message sent over the interactive computer network system from the customer through the communications interface and to the retailer business site, in which the customer specifies one or more retailer products for purchase and delivery, (2) sends details of the product order from the retailer computer to an independent local distributor, who is geographically local to the customer, and sends a receipt code in a communication message over the computer network system from the retailer computer

through the communications interface to the customer, and (3) receives delivery confirmation, wherein the delivery confirmation comprises return of the receipt code sent to the customer in a message that is received from the independent local distributor and, in response, the retailer initiates payment to the independent distributor.

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16. A computer system as defined in claim 15, wherein the interactive computer network system over which the communication message is sent comprises the Internet.

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17. A computer system as defined in claim 15, wherein the details of the product order comprise an e-mail message sent over the Internet to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and identifying the customer who ordered them.

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18. A computer system as defined in claim 15, wherein the delivery confirmation comprises a computer network message received at the retailer computer, the message containing a receipt code, and the receipt code of the message is verified as being identical to the receipt code provided by the retailer computer to the customer.

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19. A computer system as defined in claim 15, wherein the retailer computer sends details of the product order by sending a computer network message to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and identifying the customer who ordered them, and requesting a bid from one or more local distributors for contracting delivery of the product order.

20. A computer system as defined in claim 19, wherein the retailer computer initiates delivery after receiving a bid for contracting delivery from one of a plurality of local distributors.

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21. A computer system as defined in claim 19, wherein the received local distributor's delivery bid includes an election of delivery level of service.

22. A computer system as defined in claim 19, wherein the retailer requests only one local distributor to deliver the ordered product.

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23. A computer system for a paperless product delivery system, the computer system comprising:

a customer computer at a customer location; and

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a network communications interface between an interactive computer network system and the customer computer;

wherein the customer computer (1) sends a product order to a business retailer computer at a remote location, the product order comprising a communication message sent over the interactive computer network system from the customer through the communications interface and to the business retailer computer, in which the customer specifies one or more retailer products for purchase and delivery, and (2) receives a receipt code in a communication message from the business retailer computer over the computer network

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system through the communications interface, thereby confirming to the customer that the business retailer computer has sent details of the product order to an independent local distributor, who is local to the customer, such that the customer can provide the receipt code to the independent local distributor upon product delivery to the customer, and the receipt
5 code can be verified by the business retailer computer as being the identical receipt code sent to the customer, such that the business retailer computer can initiate payment processing to the independent local distributor.

24. A computer system as defined in claim 23, wherein the interactive computer
10 network system over which the communication message is sent comprises the Internet.

25. A computer system as defined in claim 23, wherein the details of the product order comprise a computer network message sent over the Internet to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and identifying the customer who ordered them.
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26. A computer system as defined in claim 23, wherein the delivery confirmation comprises a computer network message received at the retailer computer, the message containing a receipt code, and the receipt code of the message is verified as being identical to the receipt code provided by the retailer computer to the customer.
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27. A computer system as defined in claim 23, wherein the customer computer specifies an election of delivery level of service for the customer product order.

28. A database stored in data storage of a retailer database computer, the database comprising:

5 a plurality of product orders each of which comprises an order from a customer to the retailer for purchase of one or more products to be delivered to the customer by an independent local distributor; and

10 a plurality of data records, each of which is linked to a product order of, each data record containing independent local distributor information that relates to the product order and identifies an independent local distributor who is geographically local to the customer, and is associated with a receipt code that is provided to the customer over an interactive computer network system and then is returned to the retailer by the local distributor such that the provided receipt code for the product order can be retrieved from the database and compared to the sent receipt code, such that a match indicates that the local distributor received the receipt code from the customer upon delivery of the ordered products and is warranted payment for delivery.

29. A database as defined in claim 28, wherein the interactive computer network system over which the communication message is sent comprises the Internet.

20 30. A database as defined in claim 28, wherein the details of the product order comprise a computer network message sent over the Internet to the independent local distributor, listing the products ordered and identifying the customer who ordered them.

31. A database as defined in claim 28, wherein the delivery confirmation comprises a computer network message received at the retailer computer, the message containing a receipt code, and the receipt code of the message is verified as being identical to the receipt code provided by the retailer computer to the customer.

32. A database as defined in claim 28, wherein the product order information includes a specification of delivery level of service for the customer product order.